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POST **STYLE**

## What's Really Lurking On Your Loofah? Dermatologists Tell Us The Gross Truth



Using a **loofah** (plus a richly lathered body wash and some aromatherapy candles) can make an **at-home spa treatment** feel like you're getting pampered at a posh spa. Those spongy pouf balls also make for great exfoliators, especially around this time of the year when our skin is extra dry and flaky.

"[Loofahs] are good for removing dead skin cells leaving the skin smooth and conditioned. Scrubbing the skin two to three times a week will enhance circulation and promote the excretory function of the skin," explains cosmetic dermatologist **Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank**.

But reaching for the same loofah when you take a warm shower or back could potentially do more harm than good to your skin.

Due to their abrasiveness and the fact they can harbor bacteria, mold and germs, **Dr. Elizabeth Tanzi**, co-director of the Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery, not only cautions against using a loofah too roughly and too frequently; she also warns that sharing them is a big no-no.

**Dr. Stafford Broumand**, plastic surgeon and associate clinical professor of plastic surgery at the Mount Sinai Medical Center, echoes this warning adding, "Bacterium is attracted to moisture and loves to grow in the nook and crannies of a loofah. Some of the bacteria might be something like *P. aeruginosa* (which has been linked to **drug-resistant infections**)."

"The most likely route of infection is through broken skin -- nicks and cuts from shaving are particularly susceptible," says **Dr. Heidi Waldorf**, the director of laser and cosmetic dermatology at The Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. "Infections can show up as **folliculitis** (red bumps and pustules at hair follicles) or as **impetigo** (yellow-oozing or crusting on a red base)."

According to Dr. Frank, **lab results found** that loofahs contain two different organisms: acinetobacter, which can cause wound infections, boils and conjunctivitis; and yeast, the most common form of which is *Candida*. *Candida* can cause rashes around the mouth called **perleche**, as well as other various rashes and infections.

There is also [documentation that shows the development of folliculitis](#) and even [perleche](#), which is a rash around the mouth, from the use of contaminated loofahs. So Dr. Broumand recommends keeping the bathing accessory away from bodily fluid, including the mouth, eyes and genitals. Translation: Avoid scrubbing away on your face and private parts, and stick to using a loofah on your body.

**To keep your loofah germ-free, follow these dermatologist-approved tips:**

- Use loofahs made out of natural substances rather than synthetics. Our editors' picks are the [Julep Konjac Cleansing Sponge](#) and [EcoTools EcoPouf Bath Sponge](#).
- Shake it out and let it dry completely between usage.
- Do not hang it up in your shower. Store it in a cool dry place where there is minimal moisture.
- Soaked it in a bleach solution on a regular basis to kill off germs, or immerse the loofah in a pure essential oil blend for hours.
- Replace your loofah every three to four weeks.